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BARRO COLORADO BIRDDOM

On Barro Colorado Island, the Smithsonian Institution's tropical preserve in Gatun Lake, Panama Canal Zone, there is a "bird that roars like a lion." The roar, sometimes mistaken for the call of a howler monkey, is the male courtship song of the turkeylike curassow. The female usually is silent.

Weirdest of the feathered creatures of the preserve is the fruit-eating hawk known as "burja," the witch—a bird about the size of a raven. It has a coal-black back, a white belly, red feet, and a greenish-yellow bill which sometimes is slightly blue at the tip. The name, however, is due less to its weird appearance than to the almost continual "scolding" at other birds or at any intruder into its retreat.

What may appear like fashions in birddom is illustrated by the curious behavior of another Barro Colorado denizen, the motmot, a lovely grayish-green bird with a chestnut-colored head and neck. These have tails that look like tennis rackets. They are fashioned by the birds themselves which pluck off about an inch of the feather vane below the ends of the two outermost

feathers. The bird swings this tail from side to side like a pendulum.

A fierce little fighter is the violet-throated hummingbird, one of the most colorful feathered creatures found on the island. This bird, *Anthracothorax violaceicollis*, sometimes builds its solitary nest in the most exposed part of a tree, with no leaf within 25 feet or more. Then it demands dominion over the whole tree and does not hesitate to attack other birds many times its size. It attacks fearlessly, for example, the giant oriole, or oropendula, which is the size of a North American crow. The oriole is described as "helpless as a dirigible before a pursuit plane." When not fighting, the mother hummingbird sits on the nest nearly all the time, protecting eggs and young from sun and rain. The male seldom is seen. There is some reason to believe that his mate drives him away as soon as the eggs are laid. Although generally resentful of the large orioles in the same tree, sometimes it cooperates with them. A species of cowbird has a habit of laying its eggs in the oropendula nests. The hummingbird does not hesitate to drive it away, although its own nest is entirely safe.